

Stakeholder workshop on strengthening governance for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020

ILO offices (Geneva, Switzerland)
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Summary document

1 Introduction

Nearly 50 participants from governments, intergovernmental organizations, industry bodies, workers' organisations, civil society organizations and academic institutions from around the world gathered in Geneva, Switzerland on 9 and 10 September 2019.

The workshop had the overall goal of further informing the potential international conversations on the broader governance and institutional issues relevant for international chemicals and waste management. It complemented an earlier workshop on this topic organized by UNITAR, which took place from 28 February to 1 March 2019.

Workshop discussions centred on the main themes featured in a background [paper on governance](#) produced by Adelphi and Summit Outcomes, with support of the Government of Germany. The paper serves as a contribution to the intersessional process on the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, complementing other inputs (such as those from the co-chairs) and seeks to stimulate further thought among all participants. It does not represent a formal position of the Government of Germany.

This outcome document captures a summary of key points raised and suggestions made at the workshop. It also highlights prominent messages and areas that may warrant further attention with regard to the sound management of chemicals and waste. The document does not seek to express a consensus view or negotiated agreements.

2 Workshop methodology

The [agenda](#) closely followed the structure and elements of the aforementioned background paper on governance. After a keynote introduction from Ms. Gertrud Sahler, the President of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, an initial panel (session 1) introduced a number of institutions

and issues referred to in the paper, such as the General Assembly, the High-Level Political Forum, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and multilateral environmental agreements. This panel was convened to convey knowledge on the above institutions and take stock of and discuss their potential role in chemicals and waste management beyond 2020.

The workshop had introductory panels for each session, sharing knowledge and updates on relevant topics, discussants from the participants, and, when time permitted, general discussion and input; this discussion took place either in working groups with report back sessions, or in a plenary setting.

3 Workshop themes, insights and outcomes

A conclusion of the recently published GCO-II is that the 2020 goal to achieve the sound management of chemicals and waste will not be met. Therefore, “business as usual is not an option”. To address prevailing gaps, participants expressed support for:

1. Raising political awareness about the need for the sound management of chemicals and waste;
2. Increasing commitments and action by all stakeholders;
3. Strengthening institutional coherence within institutional mandates at all levels and in all sectors.

To generate increased momentum and support, further action may be valuable at the highest political level in the UN system, such as the General Assembly and governing bodies of specialized agencies, as outlined below and discussed during the workshop.

The following key themes emerged from deliberations as important areas to help stakeholders in their consideration of the above points. They are broadly in line with the topics covered in background paper.

Strengthen analysis and the science policy interface

- Data gaps continue to prevail for a range of chemicals and waste management topics, partially caused by a lack of harmonized research protocols, creating challenges for tracking progress and setting priorities, as noted in the GCO-II.
- There is a need to strengthen various aspects of the science-policy interface for chemicals and waste management at the national, regional and global levels, including the purpose and function of any mechanism.
- A robust set of global targets and indicators may serve as a useful guide also to the scientific community of what is required by policy makers.
- Distinction needs to be made between the assessment of scientific evidence for identifying issues (e.g. priority chemicals) and the assessment of reviewing implementation of policy. The two aspects may warrant different institutional approaches.
- “Good” science takes into account different scientific opinions in order to identify where there is scientific consensus, where there is not and where further work is required. It is an expert process, separate from stakeholder consultation or negotiation of chemicals management measures.

- The workshop heard how WHO approaches consideration of emerging issues for health, involving topic-specific groups of experts in the relevant fields, using systematic evidence reviews, and convened as and when needed.
- In identifying priority issues through science, any possible mechanism beyond 2020 needs to be independent from vested interests and not duplicate existing mechanisms. Equally important, the identified issues and subsequent conclusions need to be policy-relevant, though not policy-prescriptive.
- Options include (as presented): establishing an IPCC/IPBES-like mechanism; a “network of networks” (similar to the GESAMP – Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection - model); and expand the activities of the IOMC organizations. The three options from the presentation were not exhaustive, may not exclude each other and could be complementary; “form should follow function”.
- Ambitious options such as an IPCC-like mechanism would require substantial resources and may reduce funds available for implementation.
- A strengthened IOMC could support certain functions, for example providing guidance for the development of a future GCO.
- Scaling-up communication of scientific results to the public is important to enhance the likelihood of translating science into policy, which is often not the case, and also in creating momentum from society.

Ambitious policy objectives coherent with the 2030 Agenda

- Ambitious objectives and targets that cover all relevant aspects of the 2030 Agenda can help to convey to decision makers the need for further action.
- Opportunities exist to improve communication on the importance of chemicals and waste throughout the SDGs, integrating the issue into broader development activities and accessing applicable resources.
- In a number of cases, the framing of chemicals and waste considerations within broader topics, such as workplace health and safety, can attract the interest of respective decision-makers.
- The IOMC Participating Organizations and others that have relevant data sets could become custodians of specific targets and indicators. This could enhance ownership in the beyond 2020 process.
- Sectoral roadmaps have proven useful, with the WHO’s chemicals roadmap serving as a model creating a source of inspiration, as in the case of the planned ILO action plan. These road maps and plans can link the global level with sectoral action at the country level.

Strengthened coordination and coherence of existing bodies at all levels

- A wide range of institutions at the international level exist, leading to the fragmentation of chemicals and waste management, despite valuable efforts to coordinate. The beyond 2020 process creates an opportunity to enhance coordination and collective ownership.
- The IOMC mechanism facilitates coordination among its nine member organizations and enables the IOMC to coordinate with others, such as additional organizations, bureaux, secretariats, MEAs, and other actors.
- The expansion of the IOMC to include additional international organizations and possibly governmental representatives from the IGO governing bodies is introduced in the paper on

governance, and was discussed at the workshop. While some participants suggested and supported expansion to include additional relevant international organizations, comments on the addition of governmental representatives on the IOMC indicated that this may be unworkable

- An option of co-convening the International Conferences or associated meetings by the IOMC Participating Organizations could be considered, as was done at ICCM1.
- Strengthened multi-sector and multi-stakeholder collaboration at the global level needs to be backed up by robust national level coordination, such as inter-ministerial coordination. A lot of work has taken place and guidance has been developed which could be revived and updated (e.g. on National Profiles and National Action Plans).
- ILO's national tripartite committees on various world of work areas (such as child labour) were new to many participants and an interesting mechanism to consider replicating for chemical and waste issues.
- The role of national focal points needs further deliberation to enhance ownership of all sectors, with some suggesting rotating or a widened focal point system, with others maintaining that a single national focal point that coordinates is still preferable (this can also aid with institutional memory). Where a single focal point exists, this requires them to take on the responsibility and coordinate in advance of submitting responses or attending meetings. In all cases, common ownership of needs is important.
- Private sector companies may have global policies, but some participants noted that subsidiaries at the national level do not always uphold the same standards. A greater focus on fostering the integration of global best-practice standards at the national level is therefore warranted.

Scaled up financing and capacity development to support national systems

- There is a defined need for scaled-up capacity building and additional and adequate financial resources in support of country-driven and regional chemicals and waste management, as also outlined in GCO-II.
- Support for basic capacities and prioritization could focus on addressing already-identified issues, such as GHS implementation or other basic elements in the Overall Orientation and Guidance.
- Additional financial resources for chemicals and waste may be mobilized through various channels, such as a special international fund or reformulated funding mechanisms (e.g. a further developed Special Programme). However, some stakeholders expressed concerns about developing new institutions, including financial mechanisms.
- A new financing framework could boost, in particular, the polluter-pays or enhanced responsibility policies in the private sector. This could be addressed in thematic sessions at conferences, as presented by the co-chairs.
- A coordinated approach at the country level may enhance capacity development.

Regular review of progress at the national and international level

- Measurable and useful indicators can contribute significantly to a valuable review and reporting mechanism beyond 2020, to establish if stakeholders are moving towards the agreed objectives and targets.
- Country-level action and country-driven processes are important, including monitoring and review, and to link those to the global level for reporting.

- An international review mechanism could thus provide space for countries and stakeholders to present progress and outline challenges.
- Measurable and useful indicators and an accountability system would help to create incentives, while being conscious of over-burdening national focal points.
- Certain aspects of the reporting mechanisms of the MEAs could be brought into a beyond 2020 framework as contributions and facilitate linkages, as well as other, established indicators.
- An international review could provide an opportunity for frontrunner countries or organizations to generate attention for their progress made, and support for capacity building on reporting may be beneficial.
- National action plans, developed across sectors and owned at a high level can increase visibility.

4 Enabling High-level Political Support

In order to seek the needed political attention as part of an overarching governance framework, the background paper proposed using the HLPF or the UNGA as a means for such efforts. Given the understanding that the agenda of the HLPF is crowded and does not have a policy setting mandate, the option of a UNGA resolution became a greater focus of deliberations. Indeed, an overall message from the workshop was that such a General Assembly resolution may enhance political attention and may be the best opportunity to filter down to governments, IGOs, civil society and industry, and ultimately to action at the national level. Following a country-led initiative, this could come with a standing agenda item at the Assembly, with a regular reporting cycle (such as annual, or every two years).

In considering the option further and to ensure the value of such a resolution, a number of suggestions were presented:

- Engagement by all relevant partners (including regions) would be important in advancing a GA Resolution. The High Ambition Alliance could also play a role in this process.
- The negotiation of a possible GA resolution should not prevent or delay swift action by ICCM5 to advance the issues it wishes to take decisions on itself.
- A UNGA resolution should not involve re-negotiation of already-agreed text or decisions, for example of ICCM5 decisions or a Ministerial Declaration from the Conference: however, such a risk would remain.
- While a UNGA resolution would have political value, it is not binding on all (for example, on autonomous institutions and instruments). Nonetheless, it could provide momentum for enhanced commitment and implementation through governing bodies of IGOs to give a more prominent role to chemicals and waste management.
- There is likely a need for a mandate from a body such as the UNGA to enable the ICCM to amend its Rules of Procedure (particularly Rule 1) and its Overarching Policy Strategy (OPS) to empower it to expand its scope, as may be desired in the new framework.

Participants also discussed how the ICCM could become a truly multi-sectoral body. This could be achieved by creating space within the agenda that speaks to decision-makers in concerned sectors (e.g. food safety). While it is unlikely that various ministers from one single country would participate in the high-level segment at one given conference, the selection of themes covered in subsequent conferences (e.g. agriculture or financing) could attract high-level sectoral participation.

5 Closure and next steps

The workshop closed with summary statements and comments on the importance of such workshops to facilitate the exchange of information and viewpoints.

The workshop summary outcome document is to be forwarded to the IP3 in Bangkok, Thailand (1 – 4 October 2019), as an additional contribution to the intersessional process and to stimulate continued deliberations among all delegations, with the process still underway. Furthermore, the workshop and its summary will be presented at a technical briefing on the background paper on governance on 30 September 2019 (in Bangkok).